

**MARLYS POPMA**

MS. POPMA: Members of the Commission, I'm Marlys Popma and I'm the Executive Director of the Iowa Family Policy Center. I have to admit to you that my attitudes about gambling have evolved. Iowa was the first state in the midwest to bring in the riverboats. I thought, at one time, that taking \$40 onto the boat, having the wind whipped through my hair, having a nice prime rib was a good night of entertainment. But since that time, we have seen so many things happen in the state of Iowa.

We have more legalized forms of gambling in Iowa than any of the midwestern states represented here. This is my state. I'm proud of this state. But I'm devastated about what's happening with gambling. We have everything from the lottery to shot machines, para-mutual betting facilities, riverboats, craps tables to roulette. Our motto of the state is Iowa is a place to grow. Iowa has now become a place to lose.

Over the last several months our newspapers have been littered with stories of embezzlement. One of our largest state employers, High V food stores, just had an employee who embezzled \$138,000, all spent at the casino. We just had an employee from Mercy Hospital who embezzled \$151,000 from her longtime employer of 14 years.

Police Sergeant Bruce Sowrod stated in the recent Des Moines Register article that the vast majority of withdrawals was taken from a cash machine at the track or at another machine not too far away from the track. The gentleman who testified early on the panel that says watch the money trail, it can be done. And if I could suggest to Commissioner Moore who was asking what

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1 could we do with this Commission, we're not going to get rid of  
2 gambling all the way. Take a look at getting the ATM machines  
3 off the premises.

4 We are having so many problems with credit card  
5 advances, people gambling on borrowed money. I would certainly  
6 love to recommend to this committee that they take a good hard  
7 look at the damages of credit card advances on the riverboats.

8 You also heard that Iowa had a 1.7 percent of our  
9 adult population who was either problem or pathological gamblers  
10 in 1989. In the same prevalency study indicated that 5.4 of our  
11 adult population is now problem gamblers. This is the midwest;  
12 this is the heartland. We have 5.4 percent of our adult  
13 population becoming problem gamblers.

14 Mr. Tom Coates who owns the largest consumer state  
15 counseling agency in the state of Iowa estimates that anywhere  
16 between 15 to 20 percent of the individuals walking into his  
17 consumer credit office are there because of problems with  
18 gambling debt, and most of them on credit cards.

19 Other societal problems are arising in Iowa, although  
20 the full impact of gambling may not be realized for years. The  
21 Iowa gambling treatment program help line which in Iowa is called  
22 1-800-BETS OFF, who had an increase of over 1,000 percent in the  
23 calls between 1988 and 1997. Hot line representatives report a  
24 continued number of callers stating their involvement  
25 embezzlement and an increase in the numbers of calls evidencing  
26 domestic violence.

27 But I think nothing speaks better to what's happening  
28 in our state, in the state of Iowa, than those anecdotal stories  
29 of the woman who worked for High V. She gambled for the first

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1 time in 1996, went out with a bunch of friends and now is  
2 spending ten years in prison for her embezzlement.

3 About a month and a half ago I got a call from a  
4 gentleman with consumer credit who told me about a 50 something-  
5 ish man, distinguished, good, honorable, decent man, came into  
6 his office, \$60,000 in credit card debt all at the casino. He  
7 was absolutely despondent and did not know what to do. This was  
8 spring. This was a time when we should be looking forward to the  
9 new growth of the season. This was on a Wednesday or Thursday.  
10 By Sunday, this gentleman checked himself into a local hotel, put  
11 a gun to his head and ended his misery. The following Monday his  
12 stepson called the consumer credit and told them my dad is gone.

13 I hope that as you listen to all the different  
14 stories about job creation and what's good for this country and  
15 states with riverboats and general gaming casinos, that you will  
16 also take a look at the downcast cries of families who are  
17 affected by the gambling trend sweeping the midwest and the  
18 nation. I'm hoping that this Commission can come up with a  
19 situation that you look at maybe encouraging a moratorium state  
20 by state, until such a time that we have an adequate amount of  
21 time to spend looking at this problem.

22 Iowa has nine boats, three land based casinos, hooked  
23 to para-mutuals, plus our Indian reservations. We have 2.8  
24 million people. We are absolutely at saturation level and we've  
25 got one more casino opening up in a town of 4,163 people on a  
26 lake. So I would really recommend that you look at this very  
27 hard and very serious because I fear for the future of my state.

28 CHAIRMAN JAMES: Thank you.

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